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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1404
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 002976

NICOSIA FOR ILMG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/26/10

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SUBJECT: ASAD SITREP 01: PRESIDENT ASAD HAS DIED;
SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO
LOWER REQUIRED AGE FOR PRESIDENCY TO 34, THE AGE OF
ASAD'S SON BASHAR; NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF WHO HAS
ASSUMED CHARGE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, REASON 1.5 (B)
AND (D)

1. (C) SYRIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION AT 1800 BROADCAST THE
OFFICIAL SYRIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENT TO PARLIAMENT
THAT PRESIDENT HAFIZ AL-ASAD HAD DIED. THE SPEAKER OF
THE PARLIAMENT ABD AL-QADIR QADDURA ANNOUNCED A FEW
MINUTES LATER THAT A SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HAD
BEEN FORMED TO DISCUSS AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION.
AT APPROXIMATELY 1900 AN AMENDMENT WAS PASSED
UNANIMOUSLY WHICH AMENDED THE CONSTITUTION TO SAY THAT A
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MUST BE A SYRIAN ARAB OF AT LEAST
34 YEARS OF AGE, BUT DID NOT NEED TO BE A MEMBER OF THE
BA'TH PARTY. PREVIOUSLY THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRED THE
PRESIDENT TO BE A SYRIAN ARAB MUSLIM AT LEAST FORTY
YEARS OF AGE AND, IF NOT RECEIVING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY
IN A NATIONAL REFERENDUM, BE SELECTED BY THE BA'TH PARTY
FOR FORMAL NOMINATION TO THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL.

2. (C) IT WAS THEN ANNOUNCED THAT THE PARLIAMENT WOULD
RECESS UNTIL JUNE 25. THE AMENDMENT IS CLEARLY INTENDED
DRAFTED TO ALLOW PRESIDENT ASAD'S SON BASHAR TO BE
NOMINATED AS PRESIDENT, BUT HIS NAME HAS NOT BEEN
MENTIONED IN ANY OFFICIAL CONTEXT. THE CONSTITUTION
STATES THAT IN CASE OF THE PRESIDENT'S "DISABLEMENT" THE
VICE PRESIDENT--IN THIS CASE VP MUHAMMAD KHADDAM--WOULD
BECOME ACTING PRESIDENT AND THAT IN CASE OF THE
PRESIDENT'S DEATH, A REFERENDUM MUST BE HELD WITHIN 90
DAYS TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT. HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN
NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT THAT VP KHADDAM HAS ASSUMED THE
OFFICE OF PRESIDENT. THE ARAB SATELLITE STATION AL-
JAZIRA IS REPORTING THAT IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT
DEFENSE MINISTER MUSTAFA TALAS WILL ASSUME CHARGE
TEMPORARILY, BUT WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF THAT REPORT.

3. (C) THE AMBASSADOR CONTACTED DEFENSE MINISTER MUSTAFA
TALAS AT APPROXIMATELY 1745 (BEFORE THE OFFICIAL
ANNOUNCEMENT), WHO CONFIRMED ASAD'S DEATH AND ASSURED THE
AMBASSADOR THAT WHILE THE SARG WAS "TAKING APPROPRIATE
MEASURES," EVERYTHING WAS CALM. AT 1945, STREETS HAVE
BEEN CLOSED AROUND THE CHANCERY AND CROWDS ARE AMASSING
AROUND THE PRESIDENT'S HOME, WHICH IS LOCATED
APPROXIMATELY TWO BLOCKS FROM THE CHANCERY. WE HAVE NO
SIGN OF ANY CROWDS MOVING TOWARDS OR AGAINST THE
CHANCERY. CROWDS ARE SHOUTING CHANTS PRAISING THE
PRESIDENT AND IN SUPPORT OF BASHAR.

CROCKER